

1: Promote Education & Outreach

Background

Most Americans believe recycling provides an opportunity for them to protect our environment. However, it can be difficult for consumers to understand what materials can be recycled, how materials can be recycled, and where to recycle different materials. This confusion often leads to placing recyclables in the trash, or trash in the recycling bin or cart, contaminating recyclable streams and contributing to the disposal of valuable materials. In addition, the growing number of new materials in the form of products and packaging means that the landscape of recyclable materials is constantly changing. Finally, there needs to be an increased awareness of the importance of buying products containing recycled content and recycling them at their end-of-life. The development of effective, adaptive and coordinated outreach and education strategies for consumers is critical to promoting consistent behaviors that will improve the quality and quantity of materials that Americans recycle. It also will result in stronger markets for recyclable materials and an increase in demand for products with recycled content.

Vision

Clear, consistent messages about proper materials management activities enable consumers to recognize the value of reusing, recovering and recycling materials, as well as the value of buying products with recycled content.

Challenges, Opportunities and Actions

Members of the America Recycles Network have been working together to identify challenges and opportunities related to improving recycling-related communication and outreach. These efforts are primarily focused on improving consumer behavior, but much of the work could be translated to commercial settings. The group identified a set of near-term and longer-term actions designed to improve communication about recycling. The group prioritized this list of actions and selected one to begin immediately in advance of America Recycles Day 2019.

Priority Action

Challenge/Opportunity: Workgroup members identified three key challenges: inconsistent messaging on how to recycle due to localized differences; lack of information on contamination; and increasing public awareness of the value of recycling.

Purpose: Counter the current prevailing messages that recycling is not working and that many community programs are failing.

Workgroup Priority Action: Develop consistent messages for key recycling issues. Key issues include: articulating the benefits of recycling, the importance of buying products with recycled content, and preventing contamination of recycling streams.

Action Description: The group will identify efforts already underway that encourage successful recycling behaviors and develop consistent, national messaging to promote and increase adoption of these practices – including clear messages about why it is important that individuals continue to recycle.

America Recycles Day 2019 Deliverable:

Final messages will be shared and plans to pilot the messages in specific communities will be announced at the ARD Summit in November 2019. A potential future or long-term action is America Recycles Network members evaluating the effectiveness of the messages and reporting back to the larger workgroup.

America Recycles Workgroup Leadership:

- Keep America Beautiful, GreenBlue, and The Recycling Partnership will lead the effort – assisting in agenda development and promoting group progress.
- ARD work group members will work to collect and consolidate successful practices.
- EPA will assist in crafting specific communication products based on workgroup outputs.
- ARD members will use or promote products after they are finalized.

Next Steps:

1. Collect data on successful efforts to craft and disseminate recycling messages.
2. Compile this information in a shareable document (within the ARD Group).
3. Conduct a gap analysis to identify what else is needed to promote positive recycling practices.
4. Develop a common group message about successful recycling practices and the overall success of the recycling systems.
5. Identify how to amplify and coordinate these types of messages.

Potential Additional Actions Under Consideration

Near-term Actions

- Establish clear and consistent terminology related to recycling.
- Outline the range of benefits for recycling to reinforce its importance.
- Develop public messaging that recycled materials have value, are of good quality, and are not diminished because the materials had a prior life.
- Create programs and publicly-available information to highlight recyclables as valuable commodities (rather than waste), including sustainable materials management and life-cycle analysis.
- Perform an analysis of the successes and failures of various communication and outreach efforts and summarize the results to inform future activities.

Long-term Actions

- Launch a national public relations campaign to lay the foundation for common messaging.
- Explore the legislative options for requiring the use of recycling labels on products and packaging sold in the United States.
- Conduct education and awareness campaigns, including materials directed at engaging youth.

Work Underway/Success Stories

Individuals and organizations across the country are already working to improve communication about the what, how and why of recycling across the country. EPA intends to intend to highlight these stories in a separate document for release during America Recycles Week 2019. For example:

- Coca-Cola has launched its World Without Waste Initiative to rethink how bottles and cans are made and recycled, including educating the public on how and where to recycle.
- ACC Wrap Recycling Action Program has launched a national public education and outreach campaign for recycling plastic bags, wraps and film packaging.
- Keep America Beautiful (KAB) has developed a website called "IWantToBeRecycled.org" that provides information on what to do with certain materials and products. Some best practices have been developed to address the unique needs of rural communities.
- ISRI partners with Jason Learning to create and disseminate educational materials for K-12 students. The project includes lesson plans, hands-on activities, informative illustrations and interactive web-based experiences not only to educate children about recycling but also to inspire students to think about careers in the scrap and recycling business. Information and resources can be found [[HYPERLINK "https://www.isri.org/about-isri/education"](https://www.isri.org/about-isri/education)] and [[HYPERLINK "https://www.isri.org/about-isri/education/jason-learning"](https://www.isri.org/about-isri/education/jason-learning)].
- Battery Council International is the North American trade association representing the lead-based battery manufacturing, supply, recycling and distribution companies. They have recently developed and disseminated a lithium battery training toolkit to aid lead battery sorters and handlers in identifying lithium batteries. This toolkit of electronic resources is available to the public free-of-charge and includes three primary pieces: lithium battery training video, lithium battery training poster, and a lithium battery training flyer. The materials help people understand the difference between lead and lithium batteries and safe handling practices.
- The How2Recycle® label is a U.S. and Canada-based standardized labeling system for packaging that clearly communicates recycling instructions to the public. Over 150 brand owners and retailers are members of How2Recycle, placing the label on tens of thousands of products in the marketplace, helping people recycle more and recycle better. How2Recycle is a project of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition® and 501(c)(3) nonprofit GreenBlue, and also provides feedback to its brand members on how to improve packaging design to become more recyclable; to date, over 55,000 such recommendations have been issued.
- US Chamber of Commerce Foundation is taking its Beyond 34 to a second region to be announced in mid-April and building a shelf of replication support materials for any community to apply a similar model with advisory and backbone support from USCCF